

An ordinary or extraordinary life?

by MARK PAVILONS

Roman emperor Augustus once said everyone wants to lead an extraordinary life.

It seems humankind has been obsessed with the extraordinary. We're afraid to be typical, normal or even humdrum.

There is a Zen saying: Before enlightenment, chop wood and carry water; after enlightenment, chop wood and carry water.

This simple statement is packed with meaning. The consensus is that after all is said and done, the every-day things we do are still there. It can also mean that how we do every-day things is also how we do everything, big or small; and that what we encounter in life isn't nearly as important as how we meet those things that we encounter.

Perhaps it means that living an ordinary life can be just as fulfilling and worthwhile as living a life filled with adventure.

Most of us have a rather narrow focus on our lives the tasks directly in front of us, and those around the corner. I occasionally chop wood for the fire pit in the back yard, but is it meaningful?

I find the boring tasks to be somewhat elating they allow me to be free with my thoughts as the mundane, almost automatic, movements take over.

When mowing the lawn, I envision the final product, a uniform, green backyard. Like most homeowners, we also come to realize that such typical tasks never go away. They seem to multiply, like rabbits.

While accomplishing many tasks brings a sense of joy and achievement, it's by no means a path to enlightenment.

Apparently, being stuck in time is the key.

Many say that when we shed our skins and are able to be truly in the moment, we feel free. We don't feel compelled to watch the seconds tick by.

I get these on occasion, usually after some Valerian root. In that time and space, I am at ease, unfazed by the world around me. Yes, there are nagging chores to do, but I wish them out of existence with a simple thought.

In such a state, I choose to just be, think and feel. Chopping wood is out of the question.

I sit there thinking about how much courage it takes to live an ordinary life, Colum McCann once observed. I can see this sentiment emerge while looking out large glass windows facing the lake at some serene cottage.

We are all students in the school of life. In my particular classroom, I may have spent more time in the corner or in the principal's office, but hey, I did it my way. I simply couldn't contain myself.

There is a lot to be said for being ordinary. As long as we do our work honestly, diligently, and conscientiously, it's a good way to live.

Many of us Boomers, and even our young ones, have felt lost in recent years. You aren't lost if you lack a dream or passion. Eventually, you'll be wiser and everything will fall in place. Most of us have been waiting for just that event to happen, for the mic to drop.

Some of us feel a bit jealous when one of our peers posts pictures on social media of the Caribbean beach they're on; or the new car parked in their driveway.

These are nice, but they're surely not the criteria for happiness or success, are they?

These things are really not that extraordinary.

While I'd love to have a car with the engine poking out of the hood, it's not necessary to bolster my self-esteem. My belief in myself is more than enough.

Many of us feel powerless from time to time, maybe even more often than not. While vocal citizens in a country like ours have quite the power, we feel deflated at the grocery store, gas pumps, or doing our income tax.

Powerful yes, but all powerful??No.

A lot of us store our past failures in a diary of sorts, somewhere tucked away in our brains. They're not far, just within reach. We should leave the book closed, but we're tempted to open it, read a few passages, and feel blah.

But that author, at that time, was not the award-winning scribe you are today!

Who defines a great life?

Perhaps we need some more defining terms. What's a practical life??Does an average life have room for love and excitement? Can a typical life that includes children be any less enchanting than one that does not?

I think we can truly consider ourselves decent and 'ok,' as long as we're being honest with ourselves. Working hard and even achieving small things, all add up.

We're all messed up! But we're all capable of fixing ourselves.

The manual for this particular model, created in 1963, is tattered and torn, with some pages missing. To heck with it, the warranty ran out long ago.

We all pretend to be 'okay,' especially when we're not.

From an online post:

'You ever ask a man how he's doing and he says 'I'm alright.''

'I'm here to tell you that man is not alright.

'That man is battling demons that you can't possibly imagine. That man is struggling every single day to find a reason to keep going. The reason we say we're alright is because as a man nobody really ... cares what you're going through.'

'I feel you brother, because I'm alright too.'

Likely, men don't want to reveal their vulnerable sides and there's simply so much to do to ensure everyone in the family is 'alright.'

The next time you feel incomplete, unsuccessful, insecure, or vulnerable, just remember that you're normal, like everyone else on

earth. Go, be your best.

Robin Sharma said "an extraordinary life is all about daily, continuous improvements in the areas that matter most."

"No day is an ordinary day; all days are extraordinary, because life itself is extraordinary," said Mehmet Murat Ildan.

We have to ask ourselves, just what are our pleasures of an ordinary life.

For me, it's the smell of my wife's hair as we embrace. The perplexed look on my kids' faces. Laughter heard bouncing off the walls in our home, like that crazy, bouncy ball of the 1970s that never stops!

I suppose, when I stop and look around, this life is pretty amazing, stupendous, fantastic, incredible and surprising!